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As the university seeks continually both to preserve and enhance man's intellectual heritage, it is beset by 3 dilemmas. (1) The dilemma of its function to conserve versus its function to liberate. It is precisely in this task of conserving the essential heritage while it liberates man from enslavement to it that the university finds its greatest difficulty. A new idea, movement or institution may be really the contemporary expression of a permanent human value, not a vehicle for its destruction. (2) The dilemma of its need to be objective versus its desire to be relevant. It is important for the university to examine the kinds of commitments that may have become structured into it. But in making new commitments it must be careful not to replace 1 set of vested interests with another. (3) The dilemma of its obligation to analyze social action theoretically versus its obligation to be directly involved in that action. The university must contribute in the area of evaluation, theory and innovative ideas to provide perspective for the direct action of others. These 3 dilemmas are enormously complicated by the social developments of the day. (JS)

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Section 17
Tuesday Morning, March 4

HOW SHOULD HIGHER EDUCATION FUNCTION AS A SOCIAL CRITIC?*

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I think we would agree that, with many modifications and qualifications, the university is continually exercised in two major responsibilities: (a) it seeks to preserve the riches of man's intellectual heritage; (b) it seeks to advance this heritage. As it does this, it seems to me, it is continually beset by three fundamental dilemmas, each of them directly related to the theme of our discussion this morning. I would state them as follows: (1) the dilemma of the function of the university to conserve vs. its function to liberate; (2) the dilemma of the need of the university to be objective vs. its desire to be relevant; and (3) the dilemma of the obligation of the university to analyze social action theoretically vs. its obligation to be involved in social action directly.

Any effort to specify the role of the university as a social critic involves an effort to resolve these persistent dilemmas. They are never satisfactorily resolved. Men shift back and forth between the horns in the continued conflicts of values and conflicts of interest which are part of the human condition. The persistent demand for involvement today and the new styles of social criticism make the resolution of the dilemmas doubly difficult. When Gorgias tried to convince Socrates that rhetoric was the highest of all arts because by it, Gorgias could persuade men to do what he wanted them to do, or persuade men that what they wanted to do was best--and when Socrates replied that it was much more important to be just than to be persuasive, both Gorgias and Socrates took it for granted that men would seek to persuade by argument, not by demonstration, riot, or the occupation of the president's office. What the massive challenges of the present may involve for men who face the dilemmas of the university is becoming painfully clear. Let us look briefly at the dilemmas as a preface for discussion.

1. The dilemma of the function of the university to conserve vs. its function to liberate.

Ideally, in studying the past and present, and in projecting the future, the university is constantly seeking to evaluate man's emerging knowledge and experience in the light of man's heritage; at the same time it seeks to evaluate man's heritage in the light of this knowledge and experience. This dialogue between past and present moves on a number of levels. It moves first on the level of human skills, methods of mastering the physical environment, methods of organizing economic, social and political life, methods of acquiring knowledge and evaluating it, and more recently, methods of probing the mysteries of the mind and

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managing man's social relationships. The dialogue also moves on a higher level, the level of science, of those activities by which man tries to explain the things he has observed or has experienced. This is the level on which he builds theories, elaborates conceptual schemes in an effort to understand the why and how of human and physical phenomena. Finally the dialogue operates on the level of what I would call wisdom, the level of values, the level of profound and ultimate meanings of man's life. This is the level of purpose which gives to human skill and human science their meaning.

In these pursuits the university recognizes that man's intellectual heritage is his great and essential possession. But it also recognizes that man tends to lock himself into the perceptions, the knowledge, the meanings of a particular moment of history, and that he will develop as a man only by releasing himself from the bonds of the past, and opening his mind and spirit to the potentialities of the present and future. The Maginot line was a useless relic in the presence of Panzer divisions; a knowledge of Ptolemaic astronomy is a noble achievement as long as it does not prevent one from studying Copernicus; fatalism is a helpful cultural value if it does not prevent one from using available technology to master the universe. Like the seed falling into the ground, man's heritage must continually die to past formulations and institutions in order to live continually as a source of fruitfulness.

It is precisely in this task of conserving the essential heritage while it liberates man from being enslaved to it that the university finds its greatest difficulty. How do you know that a new idea, a new social movement, a new institution is really the contemporary expression of a deep and permanent human value, and not its destruction? And knowing this, how do you make clear to the public what has become clear to you? What I have called wisdom is the quality which is most helpful here, a sense of history, a sense of the way ideas are born, are institutionalized, are challenged by new ideas and are expressed in new institutions which men create in their dynamic social development. In his remarkable little book, On Understanding Science, James Conant points out that almost every great new concept in the physical sciences was ridiculed when it was first presented. But out of the open and honest debate and discussion of the universities, a consensus slowly formed in recognition of the validity of a new idea or a new theory. A similar consensus slowly forms in recognition of the validity of new ideas about man's social life and new institutions which are emerging. It took almost a century for our nation to recognize that poverty and many forms of deviancy were due to forces in the social environment, and not due to moral failure in the people involved. This became institutionalized in professional social work. The dominance of psychology and psychiatry in this development is now being sharply challenged by the social scientists who are analysing deprivation, delinquency and deviancy in terms of social structures and the misplacement of political power, and who see the remedy not in the form of social case work, but in the form of community action. As continued debate leads to consensus, the university comes to support one idea rather than another, one institution rather than another as a valid development and not a retrogression.

2. The dilemma of the need of the university to be objective vs. its desire to be relevant.

The second dilemma is more troublesome because it touches on issues which are more immediate and practical. No one today, much less the university, wishes to be irrelevant. However, as we all realize, relevance is risky. Ideally, a university should be relevant by being objective, by indicating that a particular social movement is related to the universal interests of man and his development. In a sense it certifies the new idea as valid in the light of man's historical experience and accumulated wisdom.

It is not as simple as that. There is always the danger that a social development or institution may be given the blessing of the university as a universal human interest when, in fact, it may be no more than a private or parochial interest. The reason why the university is trusted is precisely because it claims to stand above the pursuit of personal and parochial interest; that its only interest is the fulfillment of the common heritage of the human family and the common welfare of men. Its judgment of men's activities is sought precisely because it is respected as impartial, as being able to assert the enduring concerns of men in preference to limited or selfish gains.

But the university is a human institution; it suffers from the failures of all human institutions. It is constantly pressured by and caught in the network of private and limited interests. It needs continual purification if it is to fulfill its role as objective social critic. It is interesting to note that when Tom Hayden insisted that Columbia University stand up in protest against the "Establishment," he was really asking the university to perpetuate in his favor the very evil against which he was protesting, namely, the identification of the university with one particular interest in a social conflict. It is true that Tom Hayden does not perceive his interest as particular or personal; he perceives it as universal and necessary. But this is the basic problem. He appeals to the university as arbiter, as one who should be able to validate his claim to universality. But if the university identifies itself with Hayden's position, it loses the confidence that much of society has in it as an objective judge. It may be years before consensus will have formed around the validity of Hayden's position; and by that time, the occasion for immediate action will have passed..

There is a striking analogy here between the role of the university as social critic and the role of religion as social critic. Will Herberg wrote an interesting book some years ago called Protestant, Catholic, Jew. He pointed out that the prophetic role of religion should prompt it always to call God's judgment to bear upon the works of men. However, what has happened in the United States, as it has happened elsewhere, the citizens have coopted the prophetic function and have subordinated it to the pursuit of their own national values. Instead of God being called repeatedly to judge the works of men; His authority is invoked in support of the American way of life.

This is precisely the dilemma of the university. It does not proclaim God's word as religion does; but it enjoys authority as one who speaks in the name of enduring and universal values of human society. It does have a role analogous to the prophetic role, to bring the judgment of man's heritage to bear upon new ideas and social movements; it must support ideas which appear to be the current expression of universal human values; but it is in danger of being coopted to reinforce the limited and parochial interests of particular groups.

I do not think there is ever a satisfactory resolution of this dilemma. There are great prophetic moments in history; and there are moments of corruption. What this does mean is this: In seeking to examine and criticize the works of society, the university must begin by honestly and severely examining itself.

3. The dilemma of the obligation of the university to analyze social action theoretically vs. its obligation to be involved in social action directly.

This dilemma is one of theory vs. action. Men of action are not inclined to be deeply reflective. We have all repeatedly heard the old saw: "He who can, does; he who cannot do, teaches." The problem is this: There are increasing pressures on universities to become involved in social action; yet one of their primary responsibilities is the evaluation of social action. If the university is to be an instrument of social change, can it participate in practical programs and still fulfill its responsibility of theoretically evaluating the programs in which it is involved?

In many areas the American university has created some very effective links between theory and action. The close link between medical school and hospital; between agricultural university and extension service; between law school and legal profession; between schools of social work and social agencies; between schools of education and the school systems, all of these are responses to the demands of action people for technical assistance and theoretical guidance. The dialogue between theorist and practitioner has often been very productive.

In recent years, however, this pressure on the university for active involvement has become more massive and more difficult in the complicated problems of the inner cities. Furthermore the analysis of the problem of the city as a structural and political one implies an involvement in forms of social action and social conflict in a way which the university has traditionally shunned.

<u>The present situation.</u>

The three dilemmas just sketched are continuing ones. They have always been present in the university; they always will be. They are enormously complicated by the dramatic social developments of our day: the questioning of national values in relation to the Vietnam war; the emergence of the black Americans; the rebellion of youth against established institutions, and the selection of the university as a target of rebellion; the rapid changes in cultural, moral, and social patterns revolving around sex, the use of drugs, the definition of achievement. Let me make a few comments to introduce our discussion of the role of the university in evaluating these extraordinary developments:

1. Never before was there greater need for the exercise of wisdom. The problems of alienation which complicate the above developments indicate the importance of man's sense of history, of his past, and his heritage. What the black American seeks in the reassertion of the past from which he comes and to which, in a profound sense, he belongs, all modern men can find in a growing awareness of their own history and heritage. What we have been is a crucial dimension of what we are and what we seek to be. The primary responsibility of the university is to make this available to the men of our time. If we fail in this, I think it can be rightly said that we have failed in everything.

2. The most annoying and troublesome dimension of the role of the university is in the area of the dilemma of objectivity vs. relevance. The cry for commitment is loud and persistent today, and value-free social science is being sharply challenged. I think two things are necessary here: first, I think it is important that we carefully and honestly examine the kinds of commitment which may

gotten structured into the universities without our clearly recognizing it and frankly acknowledging it. There is no doubt that serious self-examination has been going on. But the escalation of conflict may lead to rapid polarizations where, in order to defend basic values of fundamental importance, we are caught in the defense of embarrassing associations which we should be seeking to sever. Secondly, we must be cautious about a kind of commitment which simply replaces one set of vested interests for another. By and large I think our university personnel have shown a great deal of intelligence and consideration in dealing with modern revolts; it is precisely our concern for the values which we know are involved and which we do not wish to crush, which has led to the appearance of weakness and capitulation. But the role of the university as the one who speaks with authority about our common heritage and our enduring values, must not be compromised by identification with a particular ideology. I trust that the traditional practical sense of Americans will enable us to protect the right of new ideologies for expression; evaluate them in the light of our heritage; and prevent particular interests from being destructive of the universal interests of our society.

3. With reference to the relationship of theory to action, it is my personal conviction that the university is not the ideal entity for constructing social or political agencies for social action. I see its role emerging as one element in a coalition of community representatives, professional personnel, and university resources. The contribution of the university is precisely in the area of evaluation, theory and innovative ideas. Institutional change is a difficult thing to bring about. The university is no suitable substitute for the community action association, the labor union or the political party. These are the types of groups which are designed to effect changes in existing institutions. What they most often lack and what they cannot ordinarily provide for themselves is a "theory"; some perspective on where they are going, what they are likely to achieve, and how. It is this role which the university team most effectively supplies. In this form its social criticism is the guide for the action of others, not a password for its own direct involvement.

I trust that the above remarks will set a suitable context for discussion. I have deliberately avoided being too specific. If the theoretical framework is there, I am sure you are more capable than I am to supply the specific details.